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Magical Realism and the ‘Boom’ of the Latin American Novel

Ignacio López-Calvo

Although not exclusive to the region, what most readers today understand as magical realism arose and gained particular strength in the Latin America of the mid-twentieth century as a narrative mode and an attitude towards reality. This development of magical realism is often contextualised with the historical clash between colonial Iberian powers, which imposed a Western worldview permeated by Catholicism, and the cultural resistance of non-Western knowledges, some influenced by pre-Columbian and/or African descent cultures. In other words, the Latin American version of magical realism has often been seen as a subversive and counter-hegemonic rebuke to the coloniality resulting from Eurocentric rationalism and positivism in Western modernity. Thus, it has the potential to provide a literary vehicle and agency for ethnicised cosmovisions characterized by non-Western autochthonous modes of being and knowing. Alberto Moreiras, who considers Ángel Rama’s concept of literary transculturation as a critical response to Western modernity that ‘is meant to counter the colonialist ‘“whitening” whitening” of Latin American culture’, views magical

realism as 'the dominant manifestation of literary transculturation in contemporary Latin American times'.[1] For him, magical realism must be understood in light of the clash between a hegemonic Western Modernity and ethnicised, non-Western knowledges. Maggie Bowers likewise conceives of magical realism as 'a way to discuss alternative approaches to reality to that of Western philosophy, expressed in many postcolonial and non-Western works of contemporary fiction'.[2]

A typical passage of this particular de-colonial use of magical realism appears in *El otoño del patriarca* (*The Autumn of the Patriarch*, 1975), where Colombian writer and 1982 Nobel ~~laureate~~ Laureate Gabriel García Márquez humorously rewrites the history of the conquest of the Americas. In this novel, Caribbean indigenous people first condescendingly explain to Christopher Columbus that they use paint on their faces as protection against the sun. They also proceed to mock the invaders' archaic language, as well as their wigs and their utterly inappropriate clothing given the local weather, thus justifying Columbus'~~s~~ reference to their own nudity in his letter to Luis de Santángel to exemplify their primitive nature. Furthermore, they accept the Spaniards' cheap trinkets not out of

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[1] Alberto Moreiras, 'The End of Magical Realism: José María Arguedas's Passionate Signifier ("***El zorro de arriba y el zorro de abajo***")', *The Journal of Narrative Technique*, 27.1 (1997~~),~~): 84–112; 86, 93.

[2] Maggie Ann Bowers, *Magic(al) Realism* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), p. 1.

ignorance and naiveté, but of politeness, even though they are well aware of their worthlessness. The Western-viewed Columbus is now downgraded to a ghostly old man in Franciscan attire who ends his days sailing adrift in the Caribbean and, once dead, is buried in three different cities.

Rather than appreciating this potential for effectively challenging the coloniality of power and representation, many critics and readers, tired of the misuse and misreading of magical realism, began in the 1980s to decontextualise it from the original epistemic disobedience and to see it as a reductive cultural essentialisation of an entire region in a manner reminiscent of Edward Said's concept of ~~Orientalism~~orientalism. Even worse, it began to be perceived as a mere capricious and quirky exercise in imaginative excess that had become marketable and 'for export' because of its purported cultural legibility. To the dismay of Latin American authors, after the commercial and critical success of García Márquez's masterpiece *Cien años de soledad (One Hundred Years of Solitude*, 1967), readers and editors in metropolitan centres began to expect magical realism to permeate every single work of fiction coming from Latin America. Emulating epigones' overuse of this narrative mode in all sorts of sociocultural contexts worldwide made critics and informed readers alike more sceptical. To their mind, this overuse reduced magical realism to a tired cliché. This, along with an effective market strategy, purportedly led the McOndo (Alberto Fuguet,

Sergio Gómez, Edmundo Paz Soldán and others) and the Mexican Crack groups (Jorge Volpi, Ignacio Padilla, Pedro Ángel Palou~~, among~~ and others) to delink themselves from magical realism. They did likewise with other narrative techniques and themes used by those they had chosen as their predecessors: the Latin American Boom writers of the 1960s and 1970s, a movement thought to have begun with Mario Vargas Llosa's winning of the 1962 Biblioteca Breve Award for *La ciudad y los perros* (*The Time of the Hero*). This movement also included García Márquez, Carlos Fuentes~~,~~ and Julio Cortázar.[3]

Some critics have considered the rapid success of Latin American magical realism, especially García Márquez's brand, as partially responsible for furthering the exoticisation of pre-modern underdevelopment and the tropicalisation of the entire region's image as one '~~Banana~~ banana ~~R~~republic~~.~~'. Indeed, some blame the international success of Latin American magical realism for furthering the tropicalisation of the region, whose purported pre-modern underdevelopment ends up being exoticised. Román de la Campa, for instance, claims that 'terms like "magical realism" … have lost much of their initial explanatory value. They have become

[3] While many other authors are often considered members of the Boom, including José Donoso, Jorge Amado, Augusto Roa Bastos, Juan Rulfo, Alejo Carpentier, Manuel Puig, Miguel Ángel Asturias, Ernesto Sabato, Juan Carlos Onetti, José Lezama Lima, Guillermo Cabrera Infante and João Guimarães Rosa, among others, no one excludes any of the four aforementioned writers from the list.

buzzwords associated with an exotic and undifferentiated multicultural flavor'.[4] Part of this narrative mode's commercial triumph resulted from its ability to ~~fulfill~~fulfil the stereotypical expectations of European and North~~-~~ American readers, ready to find in the subcontinent the fantasy of a primitive and irrational Other always prime for superstition, natural disasters, dire poverty, senseless violence~~,~~ and chaotic revolution. According to Sarah Pollack, magical realism matched perfectly with the pre~~-~~conceptions of US cultural consumers:

> US readers equipped with almost no critical knowledge about the region's culture and history, much less its literature, approached the novel's Macondo as a mini Latin America to consume and interpret. Instead of being viewed as an allegory of universal human experience, the remote and exotic setting, fantastic characters, and magical and violent occurrences came to symbolize what was quintessentially 'Latin~~.~~'.[5]

Thus perceived, the most popular, successful~~,~~ and imitated cultural meme coming from the Boom loses its potential to challenge the Eurocentric so-called universalism, turning instead into a packaging device to export a stereotypically ~~tropicalized~~ tropicalised Latin

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[4] Román ~~De~~ de la Campa, *Latin Americanism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), pp. 9~~–~~–10.

[5] Sarah Pollack, 'Latin America Translated (Again): Roberto Bolaño's *The Savage Detectives* in the United States', *Comparative Literature*, 61.3 (2009~~),~~): 346–365; 350.

American commodity. Yet, as Jean Franco reminds us, in its origins it was anything but superficial: 'Although now little more than a commercial slogan, magical realism was deeply implicated in the racial question, codifying racial difference as magic and the marginalized indigenous both as remedy and poison'.[6]

It is important to understand, however, the sociopolitical context in which this literary mode, along with the rest of the Boom literature, emerged: it was composed against the backdrop of the Cold War, the triumph of the Cuban Revolution, the Cuban Missile Crisis and a chain of brutal military dictatorships throughout Latin America. From this perspective, it has been argued that the Boom's rejection of openly 'committed' literature, including the *novela de la tierra* (Rómulo Gallegos's *Doña Bárbara* [1929], José Eustasio Rivera's *La vorágine* [1924]) and the regional, *criollista* and *indigenista* fiction, acquires a different meaning when read in the context of Cold War cultural interventions, particularly the tensions between political art and non-political academic aestheticism in the region. After all, the 1940s institutionalisation of aesthetic modernism in the United States may well have responded to this country's anti-communist endorsement of a 'pure art' meant to counter rigid Soviet programmatic realism forcibly depicting class

[6] Jean Franco (ed.), *The Decline and Fall of the Lettered City: Latin America in the Cold War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 9.

struggle. In the Latin American context, Franco defines this official support for aesthetic modernism as a war of values:

> But the continent was also a battlefield of another kind as both the United States and the Soviet Union carried on cover activities to influence the hearts and minds of Latin Americans. Thus abstract universalism and freedom were values disseminated by CIA-funded journals against the universal teleology of revolution, behind which lurked the Soviet national project. … ~~.~~ In the United States itself the turn from public art to abstract expressionism, from a politicized avant-garde to a depoliticized avant-garde art, from realist to experimental writing … was based on claims of artistic autonomy.[7]

In other words, for some critics, the alleged rejection of openly engaged or committed literature by most Boom authors – though at least the four main representatives were originally leftists – was reminiscent of the dictum of anti-~~Communist~~ communist Cold War politics espoused by the United States.

Marxist critic Hernán Vidal, perhaps falling into a sort of economic reductionism, conceives what he sees as the Boom's alienation and indifference towards social problems as the literary equivalent of the takeover of Latin American industry by international corporations during the 1950s and 1960s. Likewise,

[7] Ibid., p. 2.

Neil Larsen, who, like Raymond L. Williams and others, considers the Boom as a form of Latin American modernism, explores the potential link between the hegemonic position critics gave to modernism and Cold War, global, anti-~~Communist~~ communist politics.[8] Arguing that the most distinctive subtext of Cold War modernism is 'the careful retreat from the objectives of social or socialist realism and the avoidance of any open signs of political engagement', Larsen wonders whether the canonisation of modernism responds to a Cold War political logic: 'Can a correlation be drawn between the global ideological demands of the Cold War, above all the elevation of anti-Communism into a virtual touchstone not only for political but for virtually all cultural practice as well, and the canonization of Latin American modernism, especially modernist narrative?'.[9] Using the evolution of Brazilian Jorge Amado's work and critical reception as a paramount example, he comes to the conclusion that the Boom's purported non-engaged aesthetics indeed represent a retreat from historical and social realism, adding that in some cases Boom literature may appear to be 'engaged' rather than apolitical mainly because of the fact that 'the Latin

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[8] Williams affirms that the Boom is 'the culminating moment of Latin American modernism',~~,~~; Raymond L. Williams, *The Postmodern Novel in Latin America: Politics, Culture, and the Crisis of Truth* (London: St~~.~~ Martin's Press, 1996), p. 9.

[9] Neil Larsen, 'The "Boom" Novel and the Cold War in Latin America', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 38.3 (1992~~),~~): 771–784; 783, 773.

American ‘“boom” boom” modernist is an *anti-yanqui* nationalist before s/he is an anti-Communist’.[10]

One could nonetheless argue that much of the Boom’s literary output is not politically disengaged. In fact, Williams maintains that the Boom refused to engage in containment strategies to deny the truth of history: ‘Latin American novelists of the modernist project, although adopting many of the narrative strategies pioneered by First World modernists, still believed in the possibilities of articulating truths through the 1960s … they did not engage in the strategies of containment that, according to Jameson, characterized much First World modernist narrative’.[11] Consistent with this viewpoint, Gene H. Bell-Villada reminds us that ‘García Márquez is one of the great writers on social topics such as civil war, labor struggles and their suppression, political divisions and intrigues, barracks dictatorship, occupation by foreign military troops, the oppression of women via the cult of virginity, and more’. Bell-Villada goes on to suggest a very practical and transcendental use for magical realism: ‘By mixing the events with magic, however, the author succeeds in avoiding any heavy-handed preachiness or didacticism’.[12]

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[10] Ibid., p. 778.

[11] Williams, *The Postmodern Novel in Latin America*, p. 10.

[12] Gene H. Bell-Villada, ‘Introduction’, in Gene H. Bell-Villada (ed.), *Gabriel García Márquez in Retrospect: A Collection* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2016), pp. xi–xxvii; p. xiii.

I believe that, instead of just considering Boom authors as the beneficiaries of international economic developments and marketing campaigns~~,~~ or as passive victims of US political propaganda during the Cold War, it would be wiser to return to them their ideological and literary agency. While I agree with the benefits of historicising and politicising the modernist aesthetic categories of the Boom, I argue that magical realism, as well as other Boom aesthetic choices, including modernist experimentalism, responded to two separate developments. First, aside from a potential influence of CIA-backed political propaganda in Latin America, they were an inevitable outcome of the direct literary influence of American and European novelists (William Faulkner, John Dos Passos, Ernest Hemingway, James Joyce~~,~~ and Marcel Proust, among others) so admired by García Márquez, Vargas Llosa, Cortázar and Fuentes – and the American writers ~~who~~ may have indeed gained critical respect thanks to their government and ~~the~~ literary critics' reaction~~s~~ to Soviet social realism. Thus, Edmundo Paz Soldán highlights how Vargas Llosa claimed that Faulkner 'was the first novelist he read with pencil and paper at hand, trying to "rationally" reconstruct the architecture of his novels, see the workings of the complex play of chronology and point of view'.[13] It is also widely acknowledged that García Márquez's Macondo was model~~l~~ed after Faulkner's

[13] Edmundo Paz Soldán, 'The ~~masters~~ Masters ~~who~~ Who ~~influenced~~ Influenced the Latin American Boom', *El País* (21 November 2012), n.p.

Yoknapatawpha, and that the Colombian writer even admitted in interviews to how high modernist Franz Kafka's 1915 ~~'~~***Die Verwandlung***~~'~~ (~~'~~***The Metamorphosis***~~'~~) partially inspired his magical realist style. Paz Soldán further ~~emphasizes~~ emphasises the influence of John Dos Passos'~~s~~ style on Fuentes~~,~~ and Henry James'~~s~~ on José Donoso, as well as Virginia Woolf's influence on García Márquez, James Joyce's on Guillermo Cabrera Infante~~,~~ and the French surrealists' on Cortázar.

Second, I contend that the Boom's magical realism and its other types of modernist formal experimentation, rather than being a nod to anti-~~C~~communist, Cold War American propaganda, were a direct and personal reaction against the strict internationalist political dictums coming first from the Soviet Union and then from Cuba. They responded to a self-affirmation of the author's autonomy and individual/national approach against Soviet and Cuban revolutionary impositions. Tellingly, when~~,~~ in a 1977 interview with Fuentes on the Spanish television show *A Fondo*, Joaquín Soler Serrano asked him about the verbal attacks recently directed at him from Cuba~~,~~ in spite of the author's fervent support for the Cuban Revolution, Fuentes proudly answered: 'At times, in Cuba, some tropical mini-Zhdanovs have arisen in the kingdom of letters who wish to police the other Latin American writers; I am unwilling to accept their assumed role~~.~~'.[14] In the same interview, Fuentes was

[14] '***A veces en Cuba han surgido unos mini-Zhdanov tropicales en el reino de las letras que quieren ser lo***

also critical of Social Realism's dogmas and the Soviet Union's treatment of its writers. Overall, he voices his utter disappointment with that country after an eventual visit ('I believe it to be an absolute perversion of ~~S~~socialism~~,~~',[15] he laments) and goes on to affirm that what they had in the Soviet system was not true ~~Socialism~~ socialism because, behind the ideological mask of Marxism~~-~~–Leninism, ancestral Russian cultural models survived and the Soviets were incapable of implementing a separation of governmental powers. Similarly, Tulio Halperin Donghi points out how Cuban authors futilely tried to impose a leftist discipline on their Latin American peers:

> Known are the Cuban writers' efforts to remind their peers throughout the hemisphere about those particular principles that appeared basic to political doctrine during that confrontational period. If those increasingly strident efforts were often unsuccessful, it was because they were, along with other measures, countered with the seemingly boundless goodwill of

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gendarmes de los demás escritores latinoamericanos y eso no estoy dispuesto a aceptarlo~~,~~'. Andrei Zhdanov (1896~~-~~–1948) was a Soviet politician known for the Zhdanov doctrine or Zhadnovism, which directed and censored cultural production in the Soviet Union during the mid-1940s until the early 1950s and tried to eliminate foreign influence from Soviet art.

[15] '***Creo que hay una perversión absoluta del socialismo~~,~~'.***

their adversaries toward those writers who identified with the Cuban Revolution.[16]

While initially the main four Boom authors were leftists who supported the Cuban Revolution, they wisely refused to turn their literary production into political propaganda – that is, pamphlets at the service of a particular ideology; they instead defended the autonomy of literature and the writer's freedom. In the context of the Cold War, therefore, magical realism became subversive not so much against US imperialism or the sociopolitical status quo of the authors' countries, but against a number of rigid, programmatic Cold War cultural interventions on the part of Soviet and Cuban Marxist critics and politicians who, following Andrei Zhdanov's style of censorship, tried to impose certain narrative themes, approaches, and styles. During the Cold War, consequently, magical realism became an object of political debate and a focus of political struggle. Through magical realism, García Márquez and other Boom writers challenged European rationalism's attempt at erasing

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[16] '***Son conocidos los esfuerzos de los escritores cubanos por recordar a sus colegas del continente ciertos principios que parecían sin embargo elementales de disciplina política en esa etapa de confrontaciones frontales. Si esos esfuerzos cada vez más estridentes eran tan a menudo infructuosos, ello se debía entre otras cosas a que se les oponía la al parecer inagotable buena voluntad del adversario hacia los literatos que se identificaban con la causa de la Revolución***'; Tulio Halperin Donghi, 'Nueva narrativa y ciencias sociales hispanoamericanas en la década del sesenta', *Hispamérica*, 9.27 (1980): 3–18; 6.

autochthonous, non-Western knowledges. They also refused to accept the ideological mandates of self-appointed Cuban critics who dismissed expressions of ethnocultural pride as backwards and parochial. Simultaneously, they denounced Soviet cosmopolitan universalism for what it was: thinly veiled Eurocentrism. This unhesitant rejection of sweeping, teleological universalisms of any political leaning, however, never prevented Boom authors from expressing their own individual political views in interviews and public appearances.

Wendy B. Faris, who considers Borges, Asturias~~,~~ and Carpentier members of the Boom (I do not), includes their respective texts~~,~~ 'El Aleph' ('The Aleph'~~,~~ 1945), *Hombres de maíz* (*Men of Maize*, 1949)~~,~~ and *El reino de este mundo* (*The Kingdom of ~~this~~ This World*, 1949)~~,~~ as the initiators of magical realism. Another text often associated with magical realism is Juan Rulfo's novel *Pedro Páramo* (1955), whose characters, including the protagonist, Juan Preciado, turn out to be dead yet speaking to one another in the ghostly Mexican town of Comala. As Faris suggests, Rulfo 'builds on strong pre-Columbian myths overlaid with Catholic traditions regarding the communal afterlife that continue in the vibrant Day of the Dead, and hence blurs boundaries between the living and the dead and between different individuals'.[17]

[17] Wendy B. Faris, 'The Latin American Boom and the ~~invention~~ Invention of ~~magic~~ Magic ~~realism'~~Realism', in Brian McHale and Len Platt (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Postmodern Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp. 143–158~~,~~ ~~;~~ ~~p.~~

In Europe and the United States, however, it is the Boom proper (García Márquez, Cortázar, Fuentes~~,~~ and Vargas Llosa) that has exclusively and unfairly become synonymous with this literary mode. In reality, Vargas Llosa is very much a realist writer (though Camayd-Freixas considers his *El hablador* [*The Storyteller*, 1987] a magical realist novel[18]); Cortázar (though Faris sees his short~~-~~ story collection *Bestiario* [1951] and his short story 'Axolotl~~,~~', included in *Final del juego* [*End of the Game*, 1956], as magical realist texts[19]) is, in reality, more identified with the fantastic type of short stories ~~popularized~~ popularised by his countryman Jorge Luis Borges or with the formal experimentation in his masterpiece *Rayuela* (*Hopscotch*, 1963); and Fuentes only resorted to magical realism sporadically – more so in his 1962 novella *Aura* and his short story 'Chac Mool' (1954), though Faris also includes his novel *Cristóbal Nonato* ~~[~~(*Christopher Unborn*, 1987~~]~~). In many cases, as evidenced by the variety of critical opinions, it is often difficult to tell whether a text is fantastic or magical realist, but Faris has suggested the following formula that may be helpful: '~~given~~ [G]iven the great diversity among magical realist texts, what often divides one of them from either realism or fantasy is simply the amount of magic: too much

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[18] Erik Camayd-Freixas, 'Reflections on *Magical Realism*: A Return to Legitimacy, the Legitimacy of Return', *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature/Revue Canadienne de Littérature Comparée*, 23.2 (1996~~),~~): 580–589; 585.

[19] Faris, 'The Latin American Boom', p. 145.

magic, and it tips over into fantasy; no actual or too little magic, and it remains realism'.[20]

As mentioned previously, rather than the use of magical realism, the most common strategy used by Boom writers was the adoption of experimental narrative techniques and complex writing styles typical of American and European modernists. For example, the use of interior monologue, stream of consciousness, structural fragmentation, different types of narrators and narrative perspectives, intricate, nonlinear chronological variations (for instance, García Márquez's play, in *The Autumn of the Patriarch*, with chronological time frames, including atemporality, and the paralysis of time, to re-create an atmosphere of backwardness and stagnant political anachronism), neologisms, the breakdown of/n causality, and the search for an active reader who would contribute to creating meaning by deciphering the texts.[21] The following pages will identify the main magical realist texts published by writers of the Latin American Boom.

[20] Ibid., p. 144.

[21] The influence of the Latin American *vanguardia* of the 1920s and 1930s (Vicente Huidobro, Martín Adán, and Jaime Torres Bodet) and of authors such as Jorge Luis Borges, Juan Rulfo, Miguel Ángel Asturias, and Alejo Carpentier was equally important.

Key Magical Realist Texts by Boom Writers

Most critics coincide in their identification of the most representative magical realist texts written by the principal Boom authors. Of the four of them, the one that is most commonly associated with magical realism is García Márquez, whose *One Hundred Years of Solitude* influenced writers globally, quickly joining the Western canon and achieving world literature status. As Nicholas Birns and Juan De Castro keenly point out, García Márquez's brand of magical realism was exported worldwide and was so adaptable that it made him 'not just a world writer but *the* world writer for roughly twenty years from 1970 to 1990, yet is also what made his global reputation pall quickly'.[22] *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is the most famous magical realist text and the one that ~~popularized~~ popularised this type of writing worldwide. In it, numerous scenes are situated, as is typical of this literary mode, in a mundane, everyday setting and are narrated with realistic techniques, but suddenly they contain strange or magical elements that do not seem to surprise either the narrator or the implied author. These unreal or supernatural elements are presented as unforced: characters do not see them as fantastical; instead, the events seem to be either expected or accepted as customary, familiar

[22] Nicholas Birns and Juan E. De Castro, 'Gabriel García Márquez, Writer for the World', in Bell-Villada (ed.), *Gabriel García Márquez in Retrospect*, pp. 3–19~~; p.~~ 14.

happenings. Likewise, characters at times perceive mundane events as if they were extraordinary or magical ones. For instance, they see ice, magnifying glasses, a daguerreotype camera and magnets brought by the nomadic gypsy Melquíades to Macondo as magical inventions. Ultimately, both worlds~~,~~ – the natural and the supernatural~~,~~ – unproblematically blend into one. Readers are not to interpret these scenarios as an alternative reality or a fantastical world, but rather as a natural, real-life realm where people are used to experiencing objects and sensations that would be considered magical or marvellous in other geographies. However, as Jerónimo Arellano reminds us, technology is not always an agent of world disenchantment, because also in First World countries, 'at the time of their inception, technologies such as photography, telegraphy, and cinematography, were literally conceived of as wonders, with technology becoming at certain moments in time a form of secular magic'.[23] In this case, then, magic belonged in the technological metropolitan cent~~e~~res. Moreover, these familiar technologies are put to fantastical uses: 'a magnet (used to extract gold from the earth); a telescope (used to eliminate the separation between distant objects); a magnifying glass (used as a lethal weapon in the solar war); a daguerreotype camera (used to take a photograph of God)'.[24] All of this hyperbolic and delightful ~~humor~~humour cannot be

[23] Jerónimo Arellano, *Magical Realism and the History of Emotions in Latin America* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2015), p. 143.

[24] Ibid., p. 148.

reduced to mere examples of fantasy, since as Bell-Villada explains, '[it]'s not for nothing that García Márquez always thought of himself as "a realist writer." … Reality to him also comprises the common people's folk beliefs and legends, even their superstitions. What people believe about their reality is also part of that reality'.[25]

From a different perspective, Tulio Halperin Donghi sees *One Hundred Years of Solitude* as a radical break with the Latin American literature that described the subcontinent as a historical reality chronologically launched from the past to the future:

> Faced with this historical vision in its way to exhaustion, several alternatives do open up. We have, of course, the one that relies on a non-cumulative temporal process, where the end meets the beginning; it is – as is well known – the one that permeates *One Hundred Years of Solitude*. Elements captured, on the other hand, in all their cultural and historical richness are transposed to fable-like atmosphere, through a memory that incorporates them without waste into a fantastic order. … When the initial prophecy is fulfilled on the last page, the centenary cycle seems both closed and canceled.[26]

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[25] Bell-Villada, 'Introduction', p. xiii.

[26] '***Frente a esa visión histórica en proceso de agotamiento se abren en verdad varias alternativas. Está desde luego la que se apoya en un proceso temporal no acumulativo, en e el fin se encuentra con el principio; es—***

Halperin Donghi maintains that this new tone and alternative reality must be interpreted in the context of an optimistic era in which the triumph of the Cuban Revolution had opened up the window for a more hopeful future for the subcontinent. In his view, however, the subsequent military dictatorship domino effect that devastated the region turned this hope into a mirage, opening Latin American readers' eyes to the harsh new reality.

But *One Hundred Years of Solitude* is not the first of García Márquez's texts to resort to magical realism. It was already evident, for example, in the parodic short story '***Los funerales de la Mamá Grande***' ('Big Mama's Funeral'), included in the eponymous short~~-~~ story collection *Los funerales de la Mamá Grande* (1962), which was also set in Macondo. The tone of its opening paragraph is indicative of how García Márquez found literary inspiration in the aesthetics of chronicles, memoirs~~,~~ and *relaciones* (reports of individual ~~colonizing~~ colonising feats) written by Spanish conquistadors and explorers in the Americas that began with Christopher Columbus'~~s~~ diary. These authors were often unable to find the proper words to describe what they viewed as an exotic, strange~~,~~ new world~~,~~ and would, on occasion, resort to their own received culture~~s~~ and readings

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se sabe—~~ ~~la que domina*** *Cien años de soledad. Elementos captados por otra parte en toda su riqueza de contenidos histórico culturales son traspuestos a* ***un clima de fábula, a través de una memoria que los incorpora sin residuos a un orden fantástico~~.~~ … ~~–~~al cumplirse en la última página la profecía inicial, el ciclo centenario parece a la vez cerrado y cancelado***'~~.~~; Halperin Donghi, 'Nueva narrativa', p. 9.

(chivalric tales) to enrich their accounts and to convey them as historical truth. Arellano makes this connection between the chronicles of the Spanish conquest of the Americas and magical realism, elaborating a cultural history of wonder that goes from the *Wunderkammer* (cabinet of wonders) through colonial times all the way to twentieth-century magical realism: 'It is the historical development of a wide-ranging structure of feeling that enlists wonder as a form of emotional management in emergent colonial contests'.[27] The informed reader can ~~recognize~~ recognise the long enumerations and exaggerations and hyperbolic tone that were so common in the *crónicas de conquista*~~,~~ and read between the lines of the hypnotic, satirical farce, full of mythical overtones and grotesque situations. The implicit author is subtly addressing the local political corruption and other sociopolitical issues then facing Colombia and other parts of Latin America.

The subsequent novel to *One Hundred Years of Solitude* surprised readers and critics alike. As a matter of fact, the extreme formal experimentation of *The Autumn of the Patriarch* eclipsed the renewed presence of a magical realism that contributed to ~~mythicize~~ mythicising the grotesque and ageing dictator and to ~~enhance~~ enhancing the lyrical tone of the narration. This novel's approach is reminiscent of Alejo Carpentier's term '***lo real maravilloso***' (the marvellous real), coined in the introduction to his

[27] Arellano, *Magical Realism and the History of Emotions*, p. 42.

novel *El reino de este mundo* (*The Kingdom of This World*, 1949) to describe a type of heightened reality where, because of what he perceived as Latin America's peculiar history, geography, axiological systems, myths and politics, supernatural elements appear rather natural.[28] This same type of thinking about Latin America's political idiosyncrasies and the tragic succession of military dictatorships in particular seems to have indeed inspired García Márquez in his novel.

Then again, it has been argued that magical realism in *The Autumn of the Patriarch* also furthered the exoticisation of the image of the Caribbean and Latin America. In one scene, for instance, the Patriarch can see Christopher Columbus's three caravels from his window; it is also claimed that he has thousands of illegitimate children, all born during the seventh month of pregnancy. Moreover, in a famous passage, the US Marines take the unnamed Latin American country's national waters and ship it away to Arizona: 'They took away the Caribbean in April, Ambassador Ewing's nautical engineers carried it off in numbered pieces to plant it far from the hurricanes in the blood-red dawns of Arizona, they took it away with everything it had inside sir'.[29] Yet the scene was

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[28] *The Kingdom of This World*, along with Guatemalan Miguel Ángel Asturias's novel *Hombres de maíz* (*Men of Maize*, 1949), are often considered precursors of the magical realist literary model.

[29] '***De modo que se llevaron el Caribe en abril, se lo llevaron en piezas numeradas los ingenieros náuticos del ambajador Ewing para sembrarlo lejos de los huracanes en las auroras de sangre de Arizona, se lo llevaron con todo lo***

perhaps inspired by the fact that during the regime of Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo, the United States repeatedly expressed its interest in Samaná Bay. Bell-Villada actually considers this scene 'probably the most amazing spoof of American imperialism in literary history'.[30]

Nevertheless, it is in his 1968 short story '***Un señor muy viejo con unas alas enormes***' ('A Very Old Man with Enormous Wings'), included in his collection *La increíble y triste historia de la cándida Eréndira y de su abuela desalmada*, that García Márquez's most frivolous and lighthearted use of magical realism appears. In it, an old man with wings, supposedly an angel, crash-lands in a couple's backyard. The mysterious being ends up being mistreated and exploited for money. García Márquez's renowned ~~humor~~humour ensues when the local priest and other 'experts' speculate on the origin of that strange being who is no longer able to fly and who speaks a mysterious language. Father Gonzaga concludes that he cannot be a true angel since he does not understand Latin. While the use of magical realism lacks ambition and narrative depth, it does contain humorous effects and light social criticism of the ignorance of the townspeople and of the bureaucracy that overwhelms the Catholic Church. It also illustrates ~~to what~~the extent

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que tenía dentro, mi general~~.~~'; Gabriel~~.~~ García Márquez, *The Autumn of the Patriarch*, trans. Gregory Rabassa (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), p. 245.

[30] Bell-Villada, 'Introduction', p. xiv.

to which García Márquez's use of magical realism evolved throughout the years.

I will include one last twist in the evolution of magical realism in the Colombian author's opus. As I argue elsewhere, in his novel *Del amor y otros demonios* (*Of Love and Other Demons*, 1994), he resorts to a comical use of two types of magical realism. Although most critics have ignored the potential of this narrative mode for creating ~~humor~~humour, the comic tone in *Of Love and Other Demons* is undeniable, particularly in passages containing magical realist techniques, including what I have termed 'pseudo-magical realism~~,~~'; that is, those passages where an unreliable narrator leads readers to think that they will encounter an episode of magical realism, only to end up unpacking the scene as a simple case of popular ignorance, religious fanaticism~~,~~ or superstition. These particular scenes also help produce dramatic relief from the sad story of the victimised young protagonist, all the while preventing the plot from sounding too moralising. In the novel, the usual magical realism and the pseudo-magical realism, along with the occasional use of an archaic language reminiscent of chivalric tales or the Spanish conquest chronicles, serve to enhance a corrective comedy that mocks religious intolerance, fanaticism~~,~~ and superstition. It seems as if the unreliable narrator (and his author, by ~~now~~ then perhaps tired of being associated with a literary mode that was being overused by his epigones) were challenging readers

to figure out whether they are reading a true passage of traditional magical realism or one of deceiving pseudo-magical realism.

Carlos Fuentes also resorts to his own brand of magical realism in his novella *Aura* (1962), where the protagonist, an impoverished history teacher, finds a second job preparing a deceased general's memoir for publication. The general's obsessive widow will remunerate him well on condition that he live with her while editing the memoir. Eventually, the young historian falls in love with Consuelo's mysterious and beautiful green-eyed niece Aura, only to find out that Consuelo and Aura are one and the same and that he looks just like Consuelo's late husband. The elderly woman has managed to resurrect the aura of her youth, but Aura does not stay young and eventually withers away. Therefore, as prefigured by the fact that the houses in the ~~neighborhood~~neighbourhood where Aura and Consuelo live have both the old and the new street numbers, now two different time periods have been reconfigured to the same realm. In the end, we find two sets of doubles: Aura/Consuelo and Felipe/General Llorente. Using a second-person narrative perspective, as he does as well in *La muerte de Artemio Cruz* (*The Death of Artemio Cruz*, 1962), Fuentes involves the reader even more with the magical realism of the story.

In turn, Fuentes's short story 'Chac Mool', included in the anthology *Los días enmascarados* (*The Masked Days*, 1954), deals

with how a man bought a stone figure of the Maya rain god Chac Mool that, after coming to life, turned him into his slave. Ultimately, the pre-Columbian past of Mexico arrives in its present to provoke a questioning of Mexican national identity. According to Fuentes, the story was inspired by an impressive rainfall that coincided with a 1952 exhibit of Chac Mool in Paris. In the aforementioned interview, the Mexican writer claims that, during the transport by ship of the Chac Mool figure to the French museum, there were constant rain storms in the open sea; afterwards, Spaniards would place a coin on the Chac Mool figure~~,~~ and it would suddenly rain in their drought-stricken valleys because, as the Boom author half~~--~~jokingly adds, 'Chac Mool is very powerful'.[31] Therefore, the world of myth interferes with the apparent normal reality of the characters. Faris has also associated the 'primitivism' (as opposed to cosmopolitanism) of this short story as a typical trait of Latin American magical realism.[32]

As is well known, other Latin American authors not belonging to the Boom, particularly those of the so-called Post-Boom, are often also associated with magical realism, ~~like~~ such as Isabel Allende (*La casa de los espíritus* [*The House of the Spirits*, 1982]) and Laura Esquivel (*Como agua para chocolate* [*Like Water for Chocolate*,

[31] Carlos Fuentes, 'Chac Mool', in *Los días enmascarados* (Novaro, 1954), n.p.

[32] Faris, 'The Latin American Boom', pp. 147~~--~~149.

1989]).[33] Both, however, placed more emphasis on female characters, and in their texts magical realism is often linked to women's empowerment and solidarity. As Faris remarks, these novels 'enact a female genealogy of power and resistance that lasts for several generations'. Regarding *The House of the Spirits*, this same critic argues that 'Allende can be seen to rewrite *One Hundred Years of Solitude* in a mode of female empowerment'.[34] These Post-Boom authors also became targets of the ire of critics who accused them of being 1980s epigones plagiarizing plagiarising García Márquez and trivializing trivialising magical realist narrative techniques, or writing formulaic and contrived works. Thus, Pollack denounces these writers:

> Popular authors such as Isabel Allende, Laura Esquivel, and (to a lesser extent) Rosario Ferré and Carmen Boullosa and/or their promoters have deliberately marketed 'one image' stereotyping in Latin American letters, achieving commercial success in the wake of García Márquez through the magical realism formula. Ferré writes, for example, that a 'characteristic that helps define Latin American tradition vis-à-vis North

[33] Cynthia Tompkins has studied the use of magical realism by other Latin American women writers, including Julieta Campos, Carmen Boullosa, Ana Teresa Torres, Brianda Domecq, Alicia Steimberg and Luisa Valenzuela. She also emphasizes emphasises Alicia Borinsky and Diamela Eltit's 'parodic attitude toward magical realism' (p. 150).

[34] Faris, 'The Latin American Boom', pp. 154–155.

> American tradition in literature today has often to do with magical occurrences.'.[35]

In conclusion, regardless of whether one considers magical realism dead or alive in Latin America, no one can question its decisive role, as a cultural meme, in the incorporation of numerous Latin American works into the world's republic of letters and in attaining *Weltliteratur* status. One could argue that *One Hundred Years of Solitude* put the Latin American novel on the map (at a different level, Borges's short stories, Pablo Neruda's poetry, and Octavio Paz's essays, among others, had previously brought international prestige to other literary genres in Latin American letters) and attracted critical attention to the rest of the Boom and, afterwards, to the Post-Boom. Birns and De Castro conclude that 'Any Latin American writer or artist who has attained world success since the publication of *One Hundred Years of Solitude* owes a good deal of their visibility to García Márquez, as well as does the very possibility of the wide scale study of Latin American literature in the U.S. academy'.[36] Overall, the Boom's magical realists should be considered more than just passive objects of marketing and geopolitics, or victimised excuses for self-promotional parricidal manifestos or anxiety-of-influence literary tantrums; they deserve to be liberated from critical clichés and *idées reçues* about *macondismo*. As Héctor Hoyos puts it, 'Engaging García Márquez,

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[35] Pollack, 'Latin America Translated (Again)', p. 351.

[36] Birns and De Castro, 'Gabriel García Márquez', p. 8.

instead of rehearsing his commonplaces, calls for something of a double take: both to unlearn what we think we know and to read him more thoroughly'.[37] In short, let us pause and rethink whether it is appropriate to assume that these authors' works may be considered politically disengaged and frivolous tropicalism, or whether one may assume that some of the most influential masterpieces in world literature can be simply shelved as a shrewd commercial exercise of self-exoticisation in the First World.

[37] Héctor Hoyos, 'Rediscovering Ice: García Márquez, Aira and Vallejo on Chilling Memories', in Bell-Villada (ed.), *Gabriel García Márquez in Retrospect*, pp. 103–114, p. 112.